

**Jedidiah Morse to James Madison, March 14, 1823.
Circular with James Madison's Answers to questions
regarding slavery, March 1823. Transcription: The
Writings of James Madison, ed. Gaillard Hunt. New
York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1900-1910.**

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS CONCERNING SLAVERY.¹ [1823]. MAD. MSS.

1 Jedediah Morse wrote to Madison from New Haven March 14, 1823, sending a printed list of questions “from a respectable Correspondent in Liverpool, deeply engaged in the Abolition of the Slave Trade, and the Amelioration of the condition of Slaves,” and asking Madison to furnish brief answers. The questions follow:

1. Do the planters generally live on their own estates?
2. Does a planter with ten or fifteen slaves employ an overlooker, or does he overlook his slaves himself?
3. Obtain estimates of the culture of Sugar and Cotton, to show what difference it makes where the planter resides on his estate, or where he employs attorneys, overlookers, &c.
4. Is it a common or general practice to mortgage slave estates?
5. Are sales of slave estates very frequent under execution for debt, and what proportion of the whole may be thus sold annually?
6. Does the Planter possess the power of selling the different branches of a family separate?

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7. When the prices of produce, Cotton, Sugar, &c., are high, do the Planters purchase, instead of raising, their corn and other provisions?
8. When the prices of produce are low, do they then raise their own corn and other provisions?
9. Do the negroes fare better when the Corn, &c., is raised upon their master's estate, or when he buys it?
10. Do the tobacco planters in America ever buy their own Corn or other food, or do they always raise it?
11. If they always, or mostly, raise it, can any other reason be given for the difference of the system pursued by them and that pursued by the Sugar and Cotton planters than that the cultivation of tobacco is less profitable than that of Cotton or Sugar?
12. Do any of the Planters manufacture the packages for their produce, or the clothing for their negroes? and if they do, are their negroes better clothed than when clothing is purchased?
13. Where, and by whom, is the Cotton bagging of the Brazils made? is it principally made by free men or slaves?
14. Is it the general system to employ the negroes in task work, or by the day?
15. How many hours are they generally at work in the former case? how many in the latter? Which system is generally preferred by the master? which by the slaves?
16. Is it common to allow them a certain portion of time instead of their allowance of provisions? In this case, how much is allowed? Where the slaves have the option, which

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do they generally choose? On which system do the slaves look the best, and acquire the most comforts?

17. Are there many small plantations where the owners possess only a few slaves? What proportion of the whole may be supposed to be held in this way?

18. In such cases, are the slaves treated or almost considered a part of the family?

19. Do the slaves fare the best when their situations and that of the master are brought nearest together?

20. In what state are the slaves as to religion or religious instruction?

21. Is it common for the slaves to be regularly married?

22. If a man forms an attachment to a woman on a different or distant plantation, is it the general practice for some accommodation to take place between the owners of the man and woman, so that they may live together?

23. In the United States of America, the slaves are found to increase at about the rate of 3 [??] cent. [??] annum. Does the same take place in other places? Give a census, if such is taken. Show what cause contributes to this increase or what prevents it where it does not take place.

24. Obtain a variety of estimates from the Planters of the cost of bringing up a child, and at what age it becomes a clear gain to its owner.

25. Obtain information respecting the comparative cheapness of cultivation by slaves or by free men.

26. Is it common for the free blacks to labour in the field?

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27. Where the labourers consist of free blacks and of white men, what are the relative prices of their labour when employed about the same work?

28. What is the proportion of free blacks and slaves?

29. Is it considered that the increase in the proportion of free blacks to slaves increases or diminishes the danger of insurrection?

30. Are the free blacks employed in the defence of the Country, and do they and the Creoles preclude the necessity of European troops?

31. Do the free blacks appear to consider themselves as more closely connected with the slaves or with the white population? and in cases of insurrection, with which have they generally taken part?

32. What is their general character with respect to industry and order, as compared with that of the slaves?

33. Are there any instances of emancipation in particular estates, and what is the result?

34. Is there any general plan of emancipation in progress, and what?

35. What was the mode and progress of emancipation in those States in America where slavery has ceased to exist?— *Mad. MSS.*

1. Yes.

2. Employs an overseer for that number of slaves with few exceptions

3. —

4. Not uncommonly the land, sometimes the slaves, very rarely both together

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5. The common law as in England governs the relation between land & debts; Slaves are often sold under execution for debt; the proportion to the whole, cannot be great within a year, and varies of course, with the amount of debts, and the urgency of creditors.

6. Yes.

7–10. Instances are rare where the Tobacco planters do not raise their own provisions.

11. The proper comparison not between the culture of Tobo. & that of Sugar and Cotton, but between each of these cultures & that of provisions. The Tobo. planter finds it cheaper to make them a part of his crop than to buy them. The Cotton & Sugar planters to buy them, where this is the case, than to raise them. The term cheaper embraces the comparative facility & certainty, of procuring the supplies.

12. Generally best cloathed, when from the household manufactures, which are increasing.

14, 15. Slaves seldom employed in regular task work. They prefer it only when rewarded with the surplus time gained by their industry.

16. Not the practice to substitute an allowance of time for the allowance of provisions.

17. Very many & increasing with the progressive subdivisions of property; the proportion cannot be stated.

18, 19. The fewer the slaves & the fewer the holders of slaves, the greater the indulgence & familiarity. In districts comprising large masses of slaves; there is no difference in their condition whether held in small or large numbers, beyond the difference in the dispositions of the owners, and the greater strictness of attention where the number is greater.

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20. There is no general system of religious instruction. There are few spots where religious worship is not within reach, and to which they do not resort. Many are regular members of Congregations chiefly Baptist; and some Preachers also, tho' rarely able to read.

21. Not common; but the instances are increasing.

22. The accommodation not unfrequent where the plantations are very distant. The slaves prefer wives on a different plantation; as affording occasions & pretexts for going abroad, and exempting them on holidays from a share of the little calls to which those at home are liable.

23. The remarkable increase of slaves, as shewn by the Census, results from the comparative defect of moral and prudential restraint on the Sexual connexion; and from the absence at the same time, of that counteracting licentiousness of intercourse, of which the worst examples are to be traced where the African trade as in the W. Indies keeps the number of females, less than of the males

24. The annual expense of food & raiment in rearing a child, may be stated at about 8, 9, or 10 dollars; and the age at which it begins to be gainful to its owner, about 9 or 10 years.

25. The practice here does not furnish data for a comparison of cheapness, between these two modes of cultivation.

26. They are sometimes hired for field labour in time of harvest, and on other particular occasions.

27. The examples are too few to have established any such relative prices.

28. See the Census.

29. Rather increases.

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30. —

31. More closely with the slaves, and more likely to side with them in a case of insurrection

32. Generally idle and depraved; appearing to retain the bad qualities of the slaves with whom they continue to associate, without acquiring any of the good ones of the whites, from whom [they] continue separated by prejudices agst. their colour & other peculiarities.

33. There are occasional instances in the present legal condition of leaving the State

34. None

35. —

J. M. presents his respects to Dr. Morse, with the annexed answers to the Queries accompanying his letter of the 14th inst: so far as they were applicable to this State. The answers c. not conveniently be extended as much as might perhaps be desired. Their brevity and inadequacy will be an apology for requesting, that if any use be made of them, it may be done without a reference to the source furnishing them.

Montpr., Mar. 28, 1823.